



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

October 20, 2005

The Honorable Dennis Hastert
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Hastert:

The Episcopal Church supports the Affordable Housing Fund as part of the *Federal Housing Finance Reform Act of 2005* (H.R. 1461). However, we are strongly opposed to the inclusion of language in H.R. 1461 that restricts non-profits - including religious organizations - from receiving Affordable Housing Funds if they have engaged in any voter registration, voter identification, get-out-the-vote, and other nonpartisan voter participation activities or voter encouragement efforts within 12 months of the application. The very people in need of affordable housing are those who often need the most help in fully participating in our democracy as voters. It is highly ironic that at the very moment when we have seen in the starkest of terms the great need for affordable housing, important legislation to meet that need is encumbered with language that undermines our democracy.

The Episcopal Church, through Jubilee Ministries and Episcopal service providers, offers housing assistance to many of our nation's poor. Jubilee Ministries administers grants to over 70 Jubilee Centers throughout the United States as well as the wider Anglican Communion. Including a provision that would prohibit Episcopal organizations that encourage democratic engagement from participating in Affordable Housing Fund programs would limit our response to God's call to serve the least among us and severely restrict our efforts to provide safe, decent, and affordable housing.

In supporting the Affordable Housing Fund in H.R. 1461, we are acting upon a resolution passed at our 2003 General Convention that reaffirmed our commitment to providing affordable housing for the poor. The resolution calls for the legislative branches of the federal government to provide "rental and owner-occupied housing that is safe, accessible, and affordable for low-income and moderate-income persons and their families including persons with disabilities" and "to ensure that housing assistance programs are adequately funded to address the growing gap between the number of affordable housing units available and the number of renter households in the bottom quartile of income in this nation."

As a church we have also acknowledged "the use of the political process as an act of Christian stewardship" and recognized that a "faithful commitment to voting is an extension of our baptismal covenant to 'strive for justice and peace and the dignity of every human being.'" We have asked "all Episcopalians to actively engage in advocating for voter rights,

encouraging voter registration, getting out the vote, and volunteering to assist voters at the polls."

Mr. Speaker, we ask that you do all in your power to see that the provisions related to voter participation are removed from H.R. 1461. No organization should be asked to choose between providing homes for those in need or enabling citizens to fully participate fully in our democracy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kwasi Thornell +". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small cross-like mark at the end.

The Reverend Kwasi A. Thornell
Chair, National Concerns Committee of the Executive Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John Bryson Chane". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small cross-like mark at the beginning.

The Right Reverend John Bryson Chane, D.D.
Bishop of Washington